

The Christian News-Letter

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Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

The greatest temptation which besets us now is to yield to depression, to feel that the tremendous struggles of the past six years have resulted only in ruined cities, starving people and near-chaos in Europe, and shortages, strikes and general malaise at home.

The Council of Foreign Ministers failed to reach agreement on political issues. But a far more lamentable demonstration of spiritual bankruptcy was the fact that with millions of human lives depending on the joint action of the Great Powers, the Council did not give priority over every other issue to immediate steps to avert a vast human tragedy. Instead of deploring these failures and being overcome by depression we have to ask ourselves what we can do this winter to save Europe from famine, disease, violence and utter ruin.

WHAT DOES SAVING EUROPE MEAN?

Our readers, at least in this country, are probably already familiar with the movement named "Save Europe Now."¹ A letter to the press, signed by the Bishop of Chichester, Professor Gilbert Murray and others, gave a brief account of the expulsion from Poland and Czechoslovakia of several millions of Germans. In response to their appeal thousands of people have indicated that they are willing to contribute food to a voluntary scheme of relief if it can be sponsored. A meeting held in London on October 8th and attended by members of Parliament and representatives of many political and voluntary organizations, urged the Government to redouble its efforts to secure agreement with the Russian, Czech and Polish Governments to terminate the expulsion of Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia into Eastern Germany, to concert with the American and French authorities schemes for providing for those already expelled, and to press forward the rehabilitation of transport and the mining industry on which the economic recovery of Europe depends. It also asked the Government to sponsor an immediate practical scheme for collecting and dispensing gifts of food for relief in Europe.

¹ 144 Southampton Row, London, W.C. 1.

Overtopping all other tragedies in scale and intensity is the misery of the expelled Germans, pouring from Poland and Czechoslovakia into the Russian zone and filtering in ever-increasing numbers into the British and American zones. Thousands of children are parentless, violence, robbery and cruelty are common-places. The Roman Catholic bishops of Germany, meeting at Fulda in August, wrote in their pastoral letter of the widespread raping of women. Refugees coming into Berlin are given one day's rations and instructed to obtain permits to take them farther west. On the handles of the church doors hang bags into which members of the congregation drop scraps from their own meagre rations; many have adopted orphans. The reorganized German Red Cross is absolutely unable to cope with the magnitude of the task of relief. Towns refuse entry to them for fear of epidemics and many are camped in the open air. These refugees, stripped, starving, disease-ridden have to be received into a Germany whose cities and industries are ruined. "The citizen of north Germany," says a returning British chaplain, "asks one question—will my cellar be water-tight this winter?"

But there is hardly a corner of Europe which is not going to know hunger, cold, worklessness and probable unrest this winter. "I have just come back from Italy," writes Dr. George MacLeod. "There you see thousands of people sitting in the streets of half-ruined villages; the local factory destroyed—no chance to rebuild because no steel; no steel because no coal; no fuel in factory or home." A leading Dutch churchman spoke in London recently of his country's plight, "Ours is the most thickly populated country in Europe, supporting itself before the war by intensive agriculture. German destruction and allied bombing, necessary to drive the Germans out, have destroyed thousands of acres. Reclamation will take years and in Holland there is a strong demand for German agricultural land to be given to Holland to feed our people and to house our dispossessed farming population."

If we look at this picture squarely and without despair, certain facts stand out. The first is that it is not just a coincidence that there are hungry people and idle factories from east to west and south to north of Europe. Europe is one in suffering because she is a single economy. Of that economy Germany is the centre. If Europe is going to struggle to her feet and live again, Germany must live. If our allies are to rebuild their cities and give employment to their people, Germany's mines must produce coal and her industries must not be destroyed. Readers of *The Economist* know all this, but for most people the picture of Germany flat on her back is an assurance that she will be unable to make war. The first job to be done is, therefore, to forestall the outcry, "Why all this for Germany? Don't the Germans deserve all that's come to

them?" by getting home to people the idea that Europe is *one*. There cannot be a dead innocuous Germany; there may very well be an immovable corpse, infecting all around with death.

The next thing is to build up in people's minds the idea that our job in Europe is not one of merely negative prevention, but a positive creative task of helping to build a new life there. We are in danger of throwing away an invaluable asset—the idealism which ordinary men and women put into the allied cause during the war. Even in the hardest days we believed that we were fighting for something more than survival. With a touch of imaginative genius Field-Marshal Montgomery changed the name of his forces from British Expeditionary Force to British Liberation Army. We really did believe that we were bringing freedom to Europe. Many even thought that in some sense we were freeing Germany itself from the iron hand of the Nazis. No ordinary chap is fool enough to think that worklessness, cold and misery are liberation. He wants to see his job brought to a decent conclusion. It would be possible to recreate in the minds of our people a picture of our task in Europe which would stir the imagination and which would turn our task in Germany from a dreary duty of prevention into one of creative activity. Denazification is a measure of political success, and as such is important. It will become increasingly important when Germany returns to having any political life of her own and when the allies are less directly in control than they are now. The writer of the Supplement on international affairs in C.N.-L. No. 235 remarked in conversation recently that there is not at present a political problem of Germany; it is a vast human problem. The measure of our success in solving this human problem is in terms of schools reopened, mines working, transport restored, agricultural output increased. A good and efficient administration in our zone of Germany is something of which we should be justly proud, and of which we hear too little.

Something of the spirit with which we could regard the task of an army of occupation is conveyed in a letter which has reached us from a Lieutenant-Colonel in the British zone in Austria. He writes: "Nowhere in Europe will it be easy, and already we fear possible epidemics, almost certain starvation in some areas, and absolutely certain desperate cold and lack of fuel. . . . However, though many of us who, while the war was on worked hard and who since the war ended have worked even harder, are feeling weary, there is no loss of heart, and we know that by our efforts a tremendous amount can be done to help Europe through the first big battle of peace, and thereby lay the foundations of a stable order. So, naturally, we are going flat out, without respite or thought, except in passing, of relaxation. One of the *great* things is that just as in national crises, such as wars, so now, in this national and

international crisis . . . there lie the makings of co-operative administrations based on realistic and practical concepts."

The third thing to be done is to render whatever aid we can to mitigate the sufferings of men, women and children in Europe. Thousands of people in this country want to help. To the administrator, several thousand people wanting to send pats of butter, tins of beans and woolly vests from central England to central Europe are a perfect nuisance. No voluntary aid can of itself save the millions of lives which are in jeopardy. But we have to face the fact that there are no vast untapped reserves on which we can draw for large-scale, government schemes of relief. Only careful national housekeeping enables the Ministry of Food to maintain our rations. We are going to be no help to Europe if we ourselves after years of rationing (which has fallen very hardly on working families with growing children) fall victims to epidemics. But there are many who can spare something which might at least save someone. We have the means of making collections through voluntary organizations and the Churches in this country. On the Continent the Churches are already doing what they can to bring relief, and we have our own relief units at work. Other organizations want to help. The World Council of Churches under strong pressure from the Churches in America has added material relief to what it is already planning for the rehabilitation of Christian institutions. But only the Government can enable what is collected here to be transported to the Continent. To dam the springs of pity is an act of violence to what is best in men, likely to harden the mind and deaden the conscience, and we hope that those who are trying to get Government help in conveying what is collected in this country will stick to their guns. An act which shows that some people care deeply for the saving of human lives is as important as any vast impersonal relief scheme for rebuilding the future.

We have seen a terrible outbreak of suffering in Europe, much of it the result of deliberate human cruelty. "Let them suffer ; let them know what it is like" is what we naturally feel towards those who stood idly by while Nazi crimes were perpetrated. But what will happen to them if we just let them take what is coming to them ? Will they become chastened and ennobled by this experience ? The general run of people are not ennobled but coarsened and brutalized by suffering. Our duty as Christians is to struggle to turn back these tides of cruelty, flowing at their strongest in the concentration camps, but seeping into creeks and inlets in our own minds.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss

THE RELIGIOUS LEVEL OF THE WORLD CRISIS

By REINHOLD NIEBUHR

The political and economic chaos of Europe and the world, left by a war which not only reduced cities to rubble, but social systems to ruin, strikes the eye and arrests the attention of even the most cursory observer. But the spiritual and religious confusion in what was once "Christendom," is an even more profound revelation of the depth of the world crisis than the more obvious social and political perplexities of our day. If we dismiss for a moment the religious problems which confront non-Christian nations, such as Japan, we can summarize the spiritual situation in the western world rather simply as follows: most of the so-called Christian nations had ceased long before the second world war to take the Christian faith seriously, or at least, to be profoundly influenced in their thought and action by Christian presuppositions or imperatives. The vacuum left by the decline of the Christian faith was filled by various forms of political and social religion. Among these, three varieties can be rather easily identified:—

(1) The democratic liberal faith, which believed that society was moving toward a universal community and a frictionless harmony of all social life by forces inherent in history itself.

(2) The Marxist faith which believed in the same consummation but has a more catastrophic, rather than evolutionary, idea of the method of social realization. (Socialism, as expressed in the non-communistic parties, is a nice combination of the democratic and the Marxist creed.)

(3) Fascism, which is distinguished by its nationalism, particularism and cynicism from the first two creeds. Its explicit repudiation of the ethical universalism, which underlies the other two political religions, gives it an avowedly "anti-Christian" character, while the other two forms of political faith are heretical forms of the Christian religion. Fascism disavows values which democracy and socialism have inherited from Christianity but which socialism would seek to realize more fully in living and historic communities than the Christian faith believes possible. It shares with the democratic and the socialist creed the effort to reduce the meaning of human existence to purely social, political and historically realizable terms.

I. THE PROVED INADEQUACY OF LIBERALISM AND MARXISM AS RELIGIONS

The world catastrophe through which we have gone has obviously discredited the fascist and Nazi creed and ostensibly justified the democratic and socialist faiths. Of the three great powers who now rule the world, one will try desperately to realize democracy without socialism; one claims to have overcome and fulfilled bourgeois democracy in the communist state; and the other (great master of the historical synthesis) will seek to combine democracy with socialism. Democracy, with or without socialism, or socialism with or without democracy have won the victory; and thereby rescued "civilization," as even Christians profess to believe, from the barbarism and moral nihilism of Nazism.

Yet this historical justification of the two more generous and quasi-Christian versions of political religion is not very profound. They are vindicated as having between them, or the one in contrast to the other, the best answers to the immediate problems of human existence, particularly the problem of creating and preserving community within the conditions of a technical society.

These political religions are discredited as religious creeds by the same historical destiny which vindicated them as political programmes. They may have, and probably do have, the right immediate answers to the immediate issues of life. But they claimed to be more than political programmes. They pretended to be religious faiths which could give ultimate answers to the ultimate issues of human existence. They have failed in these pretensions as tragically as they have succeeded triumphantly in their political objectives. This combination of political vindication and religious bankruptcy in the quasi-Christian political creeds of our day is a part, and may indeed be the very crux, of our spiritual confusion. The vindication is obvious and is widely celebrated. The bankruptcy is not quite so obvious. Yet it is recognized by the more discerning spirits of our time.

History as such is not redemptive, as modern bourgeois liberalism had believed. The vast economic powers developed by modern technical society do not fall into a pattern of automatic harmony if anachronistic political restraints are removed, as the *laissez faire* liberals had believed. Nationalistic and racial bigotry is something more and less than mere ignorance and does not yield so simply to wider and better educational programmes as idealistic liberals thought. The democratic state is not the perfect fulfilment of human desires nor is any community as final a realization of human potentialities as purely social interpretations of life avow. History

does not move toward the universal community by natural process. It moves rather toward the discovery of an atomic bomb in a potential world community which lacks the will and the instruments to actualize itself. Thus the bomb becomes an additional hazard to, rather than the guarantee of, world peace. The bomb is thus a perfect symbolic refutation of everything that modern culture has believed about the character of human history, particularly about the redemptive quality of the historical process *per se*.

On the other hand, the more Marxist and catastrophic version of the modern historical interpretation of life is equally discredited. Russia has proved that socialism has the power to make a weak nation strong so that it could avenge an ignominious defeat of a quarter century ago. It has also proved that there are great advantages in the socialization of property for the purpose both of waging war and building a technical society. On the other hand, the totalitarian regime which has grown up under the guise of being a temporary "dictatorship of the proletariat" is a complete refutation of the utopian dreams of Marxism. The strong Russian nationalistic element in Russian politics has corrupted the original Marxist universalism just as Napoleonic imperialism once tainted the universalistic dreams of eighteenth-century liberalism. The realism, bordering on cynicism, with which Russia pursues her national interests, makes nonsense of the Marxist idea that imperialism is merely the fruit of capitalism, and of the Marxist dream of an "innocent" nation on the other side of the revolution. The very pretensions of virtue in which Russia engages, upon the basis of Marxist dogma, are a source of confusion in politics. They still impress millions of people in Europe and the world and give Russia a vexatious "fifth column" in all her dealings with other nations.

Whatever the immediate virtues of liberal or Marxist politics and programmes for social justice, it is clear therefore that liberalism and Marxism as religions are discredited. They cannot deal with the ultimate issues of life. The emergence of new evils on the level of history, where utopia was expected, proves that history as such is not redemptive and that the meaning of human existence is not so simply fulfilled as modern naturalistic forms of utopianism imagined. Arthur Koestler's brilliant disavowals of his former Marxist faith may be regarded as the best expression of the disillusionment of modern man in the religious pretensions of these creeds.

II. THE OPPORTUNITY OF CHRISTIANITY

Such a time would seem to be the strategic moment for the reaffirmation of the Christian faith in terms which will regain the loyalty of the multitudes and re-establish it as the source of spiritual

sanity and health. Where else are men to find the resource for living in an age which will, though it boast of many historical achievements and scientific advances, also suffer from many social frustrations and disillusionments? Is it not apparent that our age will hover for a long time between the necessity and the impossibility of creating a world community, strong and firm enough to make a technical civilization sufferable? Where but in the Christian faith do we find history so interpreted that the achievements are understood as a partial fulfilment of the meaning of our existence but where it is also understood that there is no final fulfilment of life except in the "forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting"? Where are the historical and the trans-historical dimensions of human existence so perfectly combined; so that we are taught on the one hand to pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" and, on the other hand, to confess that "if in this life only we had hoped in Christ, we are of all men most miserable"?

Where is both the greatness and the misery of man so perfectly defined? According to the Christian faith man is a child of God, made in the image of God, but also a sinner who rebels against God and "changes the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of corruptible man." The height of his spiritual stature is understood because it is known that no measurable dimension of either nature or reason can fully contain the height of man's spiritual freedom. That can be contained only in God, as he is discerned by faith. The depth of human evil is understood because it is recognized that it is a corruption of human freedom and not merely some inertia of nature or some "cultural lag." Thus the contemplation of man's dignity does not tempt to pride or the recognition of man's misery does not tempt to despair. And the vanities, boasts, lusts for power and ambition of other men and nations do not tempt to self-righteousness because the Christian knows that all these sins are more or less exaggerated forms of the evil which he has in his own heart. Modern sentimental estimates of human nature as we have in liberalism, and cynical estimates as we have in Nazism and fascism, and the combination of the two as we have in Marxism, are fruits of one-sided heresies, containing a part, but not the whole truth, about man, as he is known from the standpoint of the Christian faith.

The Christian knows that the selfish force in every life is so powerful that if man rises to the height of true unselfishness it is "by grace." If he examines his actions profoundly he must confess with St. Paul that it is "I, yet not I" which acts in true charity, the self having been drawn out of itself by some force more powerful than its own will, by some pressure of circumstance, by some inner prompting of spirit, by some impingement of the divine judge upon

the human conscience. The Christian also knows that "in God's sight no man living is justified"; that in the final instance there can be no fulfilment of life without the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, the Christian faith is prepared for the final frustration of death, an ultimate threat to the meaning of human existence which modern culture, in its various forms, has neatly but implausibly evaded. There can be no final sanity in human existence without the faith which can say: "I am persuaded that neither, life nor death—can separate us from the love of God."

There is in other words no escape from the ultimate issues of human existence. Political and social programmes which solve some of the proximate and immediate issues are sources of confusion when they claim to be final solutions for final problems. They are furthermore sources of confusion for some of the proximate issues, when they falsely mix the ultimate with the immediate.

There is, for instance, no real resource in a purely moralistic or political religion to mitigate the self-righteousness of political factions or the arrogance of nations, particularly of victorious nations. All men are self-righteous when they contend against a foe. In domestic party conflict the tory is a child of darkness to the socialist and vice-versa; in international conflict only a very profound religious faith is able to discern the mutuality of guilt which underlies the great disparity of guilt between the Nazi rebels against civilization and its "democratic" defenders. The charity and forbearance which are required to solve our domestic and international problems must come from the sense of a divine majesty which stands over and against all the pretentious majesties of human existence, mitigating their pride; and of a divine judgment more final than all historic judgments, thus restraining their false claims to finality; and of a divine fulfilment of life which offers us peace when we see that all human fulfilments and realizations have new touches of evil in them.

III. THE NEED FOR A NEW SYNTHESIS

It is not possible, however, to present the Christian faith to our generation as the final answer to life's final problems, if the proponents of the Christian faith do not understand in all humility that the false political religions of our day gained their ascendancy partly because the Christian faith, as historically presented in the various Churches, failed so miserably in guiding mankind to a right answer for the immediate and proximate issues of human existence. Culturally Christianity has tended to obscurantism in recent centuries. It sought to make the final answer to the final problem of human existence into a series of detailed answers to

detailed problems about "whence" and "how" things came into existence. It frequently insisted that the sublime truth which it asserted, and which has validity beyond and above all scientific truth, made scientific truths invalid; or it claimed that the pre-scientific symbols and myths in which the truth was expressed were literally and exactly true. This cultural obscurantism has created a great hazard to the acceptance of the Christian faith, particularly among the cultured classes of western Christendom.

But the moral and political failure of Christianity has been even greater than its cultural failure. Christianity has made but few significant contributions toward the solution of the problems of social justice in the past two hundred years. Catholicism has been so bound to the political and social forms of the medieval period, and has such a strong nostalgic impulse for a return to them, that it cannot easily adjust itself to the political realities of a technical society. Sometimes it has even been tempted to espouse fascistic forms of politics, sensing an affinity between their authoritarianism and its own. It must be affirmed, however, that Catholicism always has a stronger sense of the communal and social dimension of existence than Protestantism, cursed as the latter has been with extravagant individualism. For this reason some of the most hopeful forms of fusion between the Christian ultimate answers and political and proximate answers are found to-day in Belgium, France and Italy, where left-wing Catholic movements have developed out of the experience of the resistance movements. In these movements Catholics learned from socialists and socialists from Catholics.

Orthodox Lutheranism has always been too preoccupied with the ultimate answers to the ultimate issues of life to relate itself creatively to the questions of civic virtue and political justice. It may be that it has now learned that the building of a just community is the Christian's obligation. The Church in Norway seems particularly to have overcome the traditional weaknesses of Lutheranism in its relation to politics. We do not yet know how much the German Lutheran Church has learned.

Calvinism has always been politically more relevant than Lutheranism, but it has been frequently allied as intimately with the individualism of the more privileged bourgeois classes as Catholicism has been with the traditional feudal society. It is not yet clear whether Calvinism can overcome its historic individualism sufficiently to understand the desire of the working classes for a greater degree of control upon economic and industrial life in the interest of security. In Holland, where Calvinistic presuppositions have influenced politics more than in any modern nation, the Calvinistic party is still the representative of bourgeois life. The

smaller Catholic group seems to have moved politically to the left more than it has done.

The possibility of relating Christian thought and faith to the immediate problems of the community seems brighter in Britain than in any of the modern quasi-Christian nations. Socialism in Britain never challenged the Christian foundations of the culture of the west as it did on the Continent. Anglicanism, through its Catholic heritage, has a sense of the importance of the community which more explicit forms of Protestantism usually lack. Methodism overcame its original pietistic individualism in Britain and furnished some of the best leadership for the earlier days of the Labour party through lay preachers who became politically active (the late Arthur Henderson, for instance).

There is one untapped resource for combining religious profundity with political relevance in Britain. That is to be found in the left-wing Christian movements of the Cromwellian period. In these the Christian faith was more creatively combined with the impulse to reform the community radically in the interest of justice than in any other historic Christian movement. The resource is untapped because the perspectives of the Cromwellian sects were on the whole forgotten after the Restoration, both in the history of politics and in the history of faith. Yet this is not altogether true. The difference between the relation of faith to social justice in Britain and in France may well be caused by the fact that seventeenth-century British demands for radical justice were developed under Christian auspices, while they expressed themselves in anti-Christian and naturalistic terms in eighteenth-century France.

Whatever may be the resources of the various forms of Christian faith in various nations for a new synthesis between the proximate and the ultimate issues of life, it can hardly be questioned that such a synthesis must take place if the Christian faith is to reclaim a sadly confused quasi-Christian culture. The political implementation of the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," amidst the conditions of a technical age, is no simple moral achievement. Only a faith which understands all the complexities of human existence can avoid the cynicism to which political realism is tempted and the sentimentality into which the purely moral approach to politics so easily degenerates. Only a faith which understands both the historical and the eternal dimension of life can guide men in this era, in which the fear of mutual destruction must prompt us to significant achievements in building a broader and more brotherly community, and in which we will also meet the limits of all historical achievements and be tempted to despair by the failure of history to realize its true goals.

The political faiths which are giving us on the whole the right answers to the immediate problems of preserving and extending the human community are, as religions, forms of faith without perplexity. The perplexities of our age have overwhelmed them and are creating despair. The Christian faith confesses that "we are perplexed, but not unto despair." It is a faith which has been given by grace to those who have stood at the very abyss of despair. It knows that "we are always dying" and yet is able to proclaim "but behold we live." This final answer to life's final problem of death, frustration and despair, must be related integrally to all the tasks confronted by individuals and communities as they seek to create a tolerable justice and a stable civilization and moderate security amidst the ever-increasing hazards of human existence.

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